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THE CAMPAIGN OF 1815.

BY

R. E. KINGSFORD, M.A.

MAP OF PART OF **BELGIUM** TO ILLUSTRATE THE

CAMPAIGN OF 1815.

COPIED FROM EDGAR QUINET'S HISTOIRE

DE LA

CAMPAGNE DE 1815.

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1815.

BY R. E. KINSFORD, M.A.

The Rebellion of the French nation against Louis XVI. was the protest of humanity against oppression. The French, that lively, courageous and industrious race, deserve the world's thanks for their desperate resolution to inaugurate a new system. Their thoroughness in carrying out the resolve brought upon them the enmity of almost all other nations, but those very nations profit this day by the Revolution, to punish which they invaded France. Even the insular English, then politically a century in advance of the Continent, found that they had much to learn. An impulse was given to aspirations for freedom which was communicated to each of the Continental nations in succession, and this impulse, through impeded from time to time, has never ceased in its action. But just as, in the case of individuals, men suffer in their own persons the consequences of originality, so the French nation bitterly paid for its generous self-sacrifice on the altar of Freedom. A sacred cause was defiled; enthusiam was replaced by fanaticism; fanaticism gave way after a struggle to charlatanism; charlatanism supported itself by murder. The end was chaos. Out of chaos sprang Napoleon. A man of the sword, he smote with the sword, and he crushed the vermin who, daring to crawl on the statue of liberty, had stained it with their filth. But the statue itself he overturned, and he placed himself on the pedestal. From that eminence he was in turn struck down, but he long held the position by virtue of extraordinary genius, courage and energy. We shall see him make a supreme effort to recover himself, almost succeed, then sink, baffled and exhausted, into a Slough of Despond, from which he was destined never to emerge.

We propose to give a succinct account of the military operations of the 15th, 16th, 17th and 18th of June, 1815. A careful examination of the authorities has led us to the opinion that the popular belief of Englishmen and men of English descent with regard to this campaign requires revision, and that there are salient features which have been ignored by most English writers.

The general English idea is that "The Duke" drubbed the French well, and that he never was in serious danger.

The Prussians think, on the other hand, that the English would never have beaten the French but for their help, and that they are, equally with the English, entitled to the credit of victory, perhaps more so.

The French, again, believe that their idol would have annihilated both English and Prussians had there not been treason. They know that the Prussians were defeated and the English surprised, and why they themselves were ultimately beaten they have never understood.

Examination of the facts should inform us which of the two first opinions is correct and give us an explanation for the third. This examination we propose to make briefly, but fairly and dispassionately.

The story we have to tell may be called the "Drama of Waterloo." It consists of a Prologue and Four Acts. We propose to narrate it in that manner.

PROLOGUE.

Napoleon left Elba on the 26th February, 1815. He landed at Cannes on the 1st March. He arrived at Fontainebleau on the 20th March. That is, in three weeks he was master of France. The first prominent man who joined him was General Labedoyère. We shall meet his name again.

The army and the Marshals declared for the Emperor on the 22nd of March.

But the Bourbons had been in power since the preceding May. A few of the Marshals and a portion of the superior officers remained true to them. In the interval, also, they had broken up the old Napoleonic organization. They had replaced the Tricouleur by the White Lilies. They had changed the designations of the various regiments, studious in every thing, Mrs. Partingtons as they were, to use their feeble broom against the tide of modern feeling. But there were with the colours on the 1st April 223,972 men, 155,000 of whom were ready to take the field.

The evidence as to the condition of these men seems to establish that they were well uniformed and armed. Napoleon claimed that they were not so, but it seems that his statements were incorrect on this point.

Here is afforded the opportunity of presenting the real obstacle in the way of forming a fair judgment of the occurrences we are about to relate.

Napoleon published two versions of the campaign of 1815: the first, by General Gourgaud, in 1818; the second in 1820, as *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de France en 1815*, subsequently re-published in 1830 as Volume IX. of the Memoirs dictated at St. Helena. These volumes, according to certain French authorities, are full of mistakes, misrepresentations and inexact statements. For some years, however, they passed unquestioned. In 1840 the Duke of Elchingen, second son of Marshal Ney, with the view of restoring his father's memory, which he deemed unjustly assailed by Napoleon, gave the first shock to their authority by publishing a collection of the orders and letters of the Emperor to the Marshal, and also the result of enquiries made by himself among officers then surviving as to what actually happened. Other memoirs, such as those of Grouchy and Gérard, were also published. Between 1839 and 1842 appeared Alison's Europe. Siborne's account of the Waterloo Campaign, which, although trustworthy, contains too much fulsome eulogy of the "Great Duke," was published in 1841. The German, or Prussian, view of the matter, as given by Von Damitz and Von Clausewitz, had been published in 1837 and 1835. Thus conflicting materials accumulated. At last, in 1857, there appeared the "*Histoire de la Campagne de* 1815," by Lieut.-Colonel Charras, which, although not as commonly known to English readers as it ought to be, must ever be consulted as an elaborately minute account of the campaign. It must be read with caution, as it is very unfair to Napoleon in many points, while its author claims an eager desire to do him justice. A critical examination will lead to the conviction that the desire, if it really existed, was not carried out. M. Edgar Quinet's "*Histoire de la Campagne de 1815*" was published in 1862. He follows in Charras' footsteps. Thiers also gives a version of the events, which should be read as a corrective of Charras. If Napoleon threw the blame of the disaster upon others, a certain school of French writers, of whom Charras and Quinet are types, have not been slack in retorting on him. He is made responsible, as far as possible, for the unfortunate issue of the campaign, and in his shortcomings is found some solace to wounded French pride. In using both Charras and Quinet this fact must be borne in mind, and even-handed justice will be forced to modify their conclusions on many points in Napoleon's favour.

The divergence comes up first with reference to Napoleon's actions after he had landed in France. The anti-Napoleonic school minimize in every way what was done, but the general impression on this sub-

ject is that the Emperor displayed wonderful genius and energy. Siborne says:—"Never, perhaps, in the whole course of the extra-"ordinary career of that extraordinary man did the powerful energies "of his comprehensive mind shine forth with greater brilliancy and "effect than in his truly wonderful and incredibly rapid development "of the national resources of France on this momentous occasion." We cannot here enumerate all that Napoleon effected between the time of his landing at Cannes in March and his taking the field in June. A discussion of his political measures during this time is foreign to our purpose.

It may be pointed out that the French complain that Napoleon did not lay before them as a nation the peril in which they stood. In May 800,000 foreign troops were on their borders. But Napoleon deceived the people by constant assurances of peace. His war measures, they urge, were not taken with the determination necessary under the circumstances. On the 25th March the Congress of Vienna had formally declared a united war of Great Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria against Napoleon. He knew of this declaration, the country should have known of it too. But Napoleon felt his personal danger. His only line of policy in his own interest was that of not alarming the French too soon, or they would have perceived the effects of their sudden revolution in his favour and would have risen against him. He therefore declared no general levy of the National Guard. But the fact remains, that while Napoleon on the first of March was an exile, on the first of June he had a thoroughly equipped regular army of 200,000 men. He had a reserve of another 200,000. By the 15th June he would have had the conscription of 1815, producing 77,500 more, besides another hundred battalions of National Guard, or 70,000 more; in all, 555,000 soldiers. When in addition to these figures we take into consideration the immense mass of material, cannon, equipment for horse and man, provided by Napoleon during this time, the fortresses he garrisoned, besides the thinking out and preparing for the campaign with the necessary movements of troops, whatever some French writers may say, the world will not withhold from him its admiration. It should be remembered also that nothing has been said of his complete reorganization of the civil administration in all its aspects, social, financial, and political; nor of his negotiations with foreign states, alone enough to tax the greatest powers. The man who accomplished such results in so short a time now threw down the gauntlet to Europe.

ACT I.

SCENE :—CHARLEROI.

Time :—15th June, 1815.

Nothing marks more clearly the immense progress the world has made since 1815, than the advance in the means of communicating intelligence. To-day, if Russia masses her Cossacks at a point on the Indian frontier, all England knows it the same day, and explanations are demanded forthwith.

In June, 1815, Napoleon threw 130,000 men on the Flemish frontier, and neither Wellington nor Blücher knew of it until the blow struck them. Of his 200,000 men, Napoleon could at this point only avail himself of 130,000. In Alsace, Savoy, the Pyrenees, and La Vendée were 52,800 more; the remainder of the 200,000 were in garrison at Paris, Lyons, and other places. It is with the fortune of these 130,000 men that we have to deal. Napoleon, having decided to try the issue of war in Belgium, directed his efforts towards masking the movements of his troops. He had divided his army into six corps, which, on the 1st June, were at Valenciennes, Avesnes, Rocroi, Metz, and Laon. The Guard was at Compiègne. The total strength of the army was 128,088 men, with 344 guns. All this mass was quietly moved in such a manner that on the 14th of June the whole stood in front of Charleroi, ready to strike, the emperor being personally in command. Opposed, were the Anglo-allied and Prussian armies.

The Duke of Wellington had at his disposal 105,000 men and 186 guns.

Blücher had about 120,000 men and 312 guns: in other words, 130,000 French and 344 guns, against 225,000 allies and 498 guns: Napoleon against Blücher and Wellington. The Anglo-allied and Prussian armies lay side by side. The highway between Charleroi and Brussels was the dividing line. It was the English left, the Prussian right, except close to Charleroi, where the Prussians overlapped. From it Wellington's forces stretched to the sea. From it Blücher's extended to Liége, considerably over one hundred miles from the sea. Wellington had named Enghien or Nivelles as his point of concentration, as he might be attacked on his right or left centre. Blücher had chosen Sombref and Namur for the same purpose. It will be seen that, while Wellington or Blücher could each concentrate his own troops on their own respective centre within a

comparatively short time, yet, if they were attacked on either flank it would take a much longer time to collect them. The readiest mode of attacking Wellington from France was on his right, that is, by way of Mons and Ath, as will be seen by looking at the map of France and Belgium. He expected to be so attacked. His secret orders of the 30th April, 1815, are a proof of this statement. Having premised that he had received intelligence that Napoleon was about to visit the northern frontier, he proceeds :—

"In this case the enemy's line of attack will be either between "the Lys and the Scheldt, or between the Sambre and Scheldt, or "by both lines."

It was neither. It was between the Sambre and the Meuse, and on his extreme left, not on his right or left centre. But Wellington's mind was pre-occupied with his own idea, and even when the attack came on his extreme left he gave orders for concentration on Nivelles, which, fortunately for his reputation, were disobeyed. Had they been followed, Napoleon's left wing would probably have been in Brussels on the 16th of June.

Napoleon struck the allies precisely where they were weak, just at the point where it took them longest to concentrate. His strategy deserved to succeed, and the impartial student, however much he may find it necessary to blame Napoleon in his career, can only come to one conclusion on this master stroke. Unquestionably Napoleon did surprise Wellington and Blücher, his plan was well laid, ably executed, and only miscarried from a series of strange accidents, which, as one reads of them, seem as if they were the result of supernatural interference.

The campaign being one of attack, it will be best understood by following the attacking force. The French army, being collected in three divisions, advanced during the night of the 14th in three columns, the left from Solre-sur-Sambre (see map) by Thuin upon Marchiennes; the centre from Beaumont by Ham-sur-Heure upon Charleroi: and the right from Philippeville (not on map) by Gerpines upon Châtelet.

Now happened the first check. General De Bourmont, a General of Division, with some of his staff, deserted. The effect was most depressing. The confidence of the soldiers in their officers, of the officers in each other, of Napoleon in his lieutenants, was shaken. It is difficult to speak calmly of such an act. The strangest part of

the matter is that this same De Bourmont, being honored by the Bourbons, became Minister of War under Charles X., organized the expedition which resulted in the capture of Algiers, and was made a Marshal of France. He died in 1846, having passed his latter days in obscurity, owing to the fall of Charles X. But his reception by sturdy old Blücher must have shown him what honest men thought of him. That stout old hero turned on his heel when he was presented, and when attention was called to the white cockade De Bourmont had mounted, all he said was: *Einerlei was das Volk für ein Zeichen aufsteckt. Hundsfott bleibt Hundsfott.* "What has the "cockade to do with it? The man is a scoundrel." Quinet says of this event: "After half a century, in which we have honoured and "crowned every man who has succeeded, this desertion is perhaps "the only one which has not found apologists among us." How different was the feeling of Berthier! He refused to join Napoleon, and retired to his palace at Bamberg. But when he heard the drums of the Russian troops on their march to invade France, in an agony of shame and remorse he threw himself from one of the palace windows and was taken up dead.

But the advance continued. The first enemy met was by the left, which struck part of the Prussian division of Pirch II. (so called to distinguish him from another general of the same name, who is called Pirch I.), belonging to Ziethen's corps, one of the four of Blücher's army. News of the French advance had by this time been conveyed to Wellington and Blücher. The latter at ten o'clock on the night of the 14th, had ordered Ziethen to wait the attack and slowly retire towards Fleurus. The other three corps of the Prussian army were ordered to move. Bülow from Liége to Hannut, Pirch I. from Namur to Sombref, Thielmann from Ciney* to Namur.

As the French divisions successively came up on the left and centre they were pushed forward, driving the Prussians back, but the latter stubbornly held every position, both on the Brussels and on the Namur roads. The French had to fight their way. The Pirch II. division was gaining time for the other divisions of Ziethen's corps to concentrate at Fleurus. Charleroi was taken by one o'clock, and the French passed through, some towards Gosselies, others towards Gilly. At five o'clock, Marshal Ney came up to take command on the Brussels road. On the 11th

* Liége, Hannut and Ciney are east of the limits of the map.

he had been in Paris. He had received a message from Napoleon: "If Ney wishes to take part in the first battle, let him be on the 13th at Avesnes (not on map), which will be my head-quarters." He had started on the 13th, had arrived in Beaumont on the 14th, was detained by want of a horse, had bought a couple from Marshal Mortier on the 15th, and found Napoleon at about half-past four. Napoleon welcomed him, put him in command of the 1st and 2nd corps, D'Erlon's and Reilles' (44,300 men), and some cavalry, and concluded his instructions by ordering him to advance and *drive the enemy.*

From this point commences a division of Napoleon's army, part under Ney on the left along the Brussels road, the other part under the emperor along the Namur road. Ney ordered his men to push on. The Prussians, who were on the west of the Brussels road, had by this time all crossed it, making for Fleurus, and the way was clear to Frasne. There the advance struck the extreme left of the Anglo-allied army. It was now half-past six. The allied troops at Frasne were part of the first corps of Wellington's army, and belonged to the 2nd Dutch-Belgian division, 7,500 strong, under the command of General Perponcher. The battalion actually in position, about 4,000 strong, was under the command of Prince Bernhard of Saxe-Weimar. It held its ground firmly against the attacks of such troops as Ney brought up. The latter thought it better not to run any risk, and therefore resolved not to attempt anything more, but to hold Frasne and await orders. Frasne is between five and six miles north of Charleroi; Solre-sur-Sambre fifteen miles from Charleroi. The left had, therefore, advanced some twenty miles. They had started at three in the morning, commenced to fight at four, crossed the Sambre at ten, pushed on north to near Gosselies, and there waited for orders, which they received about three o'clock, that is, they had three or four hours rest. They then had advanced to Frasne, where, as above stated, Ney took command about five. It is not easy to understand why he was now so cautious. He had the cavalry division of Piré in hand, and Bachelus' infantry corps in support, and some artillery. If he had pressed Prince Bernhard, who had only four thousand men, he could probably have occupied Quatre Bras, instead of Frasne, that night. If he had done so, he would have commanded the line of communication between the English and Prussian armies. The road from Namur to Nivelles crosses

the Brussels road at Quatre Bras. It was, therefore, of the greatest consequence to Napoleon to take it, and to the allies to hold it. A glance at the map will show that such was the case. If, then, Ney had seized Quatre Bras on the evening of the 15th, Napoleon's tactics would have been perfectly successful. His not doing so was the first failure in the campaign. Charras says Ney was right in not attempting to attack Quatre Bras. The reasons he gives are cogent, but the fact seems to be that Ney was imposed upon by the strong front shown by Prince Bernhard, and could, if he had pressed on, have carried Quatre Bras with ease.

On the centre, owing to a mistake in the transmission of orders, Vandamme's Division, instead of marching at three in the morning, did not march until seven o'clock. The Young Guard took their place in the column. But the result of the delay was that the advance guard of the centre, which appeared before Charleroi about eight o'clock, was not supported until twelve. The Young Guard then came up, and by their assistance Pajol, who led the advance, entered Charleroi, passed through and pressed the Prussians, until the latter stood firm at Fleurus. Grouchy, who subsequently came up, halted with Napoleon's approval, and the latter returned to Charleroi at eight o'clock, worn out with fatigue. The right, having started later, reached Châtelet at three o'clock, and remained in front of that place. Such were the results of the first day's operations. The Sambre was crossed, Charleroi taken, the French centre and right lay on the Namur road in front of Fleurus. Was the day successful or not? The answer to this question depends on how far the allies had made use of the time in concentrating their forces. We have seen what Ziethen did. He concentrated his corps at Fleurus, where he stood prepared to dispute the passage.

We have seen that orders were given by Blücher on the night of the 14th to his army to close up.

By midnight on the 15th, Pirch I. had his whole corps (31,758 men) at Mazy, near Sombref, while Thielmann was a mile or two in front of Namur. At ten o'clock at night of that day, Bülow was still at Liége, far off. Thus Blücher by midnight of the 15th had three corps, or nearly 80,000 men, within sixteen miles of the enemy. What had Wellington done? We have seen that news of the French advance was sent to him on the 12th. Sir Hussey Vivian, whose Brigade of Cavalry was near Tournai, reported to him on that day that

the French were preparing to attack. He made no change in his dispositions. On the 15th, at nine in the morning, he received a dispatch from Ziethen, written from Charleroi, announcing that the advanced posts on the Sambre were attacked. Still no movement was made. The first order for concentration came from General Constant de Rebecque, the Chief of Staff of the Prince of Orange, at two o'clock in the afternoon. It was a partial order to the Second Dutch-Belgian division, which was the extreme left of Wellington's army, to concentrate at Nivelles and Quatre Bras. Information of these orders was sent to Wellington at Brussels, but he still ordered no general movement. Siborne says that the Prince of Orange, who was in command of the First Anglo-Allied Corps, also forwarded to Wellington a report which he had received from his outposts, stating that the French had attacked the Prussian advanced posts on the Sambre, and that this report reached Wellington at five o'clock p.m.

Between eight and nine o'clock that evening came a letter from Blücher, saying that Thuin had been attacked, and that Charleroi appeared to be menaced. Then Wellington gave his first general order for concentration. Siborne says this order was given about five o'clock in the afternoon, but Charras has proved conclusively that it was not sent until between eight o'clock and half-past nine in the evening.

There was, at the same time, a special order to the corps of the Prince of Orange. It prescribed that the Perponcher Division, part of which had been since noon disputing the Brussels road with the French at Quatre Bras, a fact of which Wellington was unaware, should go to Nivelles. At ten o'clock, further news had come in. "After orders" were issued, with the view of completing the concentration. It was this news which broke up the Duchess of Richmond's ball, so well known from Byron's lines. We cannot repeat the orders, from want of space, but they can be seen in Siborne. If they had been carried out, the Anglo-allied army would have drawn away from the Prussian. The extremity of the left wing would have been five miles west of the Brussels road, and eleven miles from Sombref, where the Prussians were collecting.

At eleven o'clock at night, more precise intelligence came in, and fresh and more urgent orders were sent out. But through all appears the idea that the French would strike at Brussels, by way of Nivelles or Braine-le-Comte, not by the Charleroi road.

The result of this delay and false movement of Wellington was favourable to Napoleon. It left him free to deal with Blücher alone. He had counted justly on Wellington's slowness and Blücher's rashness. His *coup* appeared, therefore, to have all the elements of success. The heroes of the day were, however, the brave Prussians of Ziethen's Corps, who had stopped the French at Gilly, and Prince Bernhard and his Nassauers, who had stopped them at Frasne.

ACT II.

SCENE :—LIGNY AND QUATRE BRAS.

Time :—16th June, 1815.

At nine o'clock on the evening of the 15th Napoleon had returned to Charleroi. Wearied out, he threw himself on a bed to get some rest. About ten o'clock Ney left Gosselies, and reached Charleroi about midnight. He and the emperor had supper together, and a long conversation. It was two o'clock on the morning of the 16th when they separated. Some topics, unpleasant to both, were doubtless avoided, and their old friendship seemed completely rëestablished. So far as anybody heard, the emperor had no reason to complain of the marshal. The plan of campaign must necessarily have been talked over, but no definite decision seems to have been communicated to Ney. It would have been better for France if both Napoleon and Ney had rested, instead of talking over old times.

In June the nights are short, and the day dawned shortly after Ney went to his outposts. For the bulk of the army, military operations had ceased at seven or eight o'clock of the evening before. The troops had had time to rest. They were, moreover, in good spirits, and anxious to advance. On the 15th they had started at half-past three. On the 16th the divisions in rear of the left could have been closed up to the front very early in the morning. Ney would then have had 22,254 men in hand, and D'Erlon's 20,000 close behind. If he had pressed on at any hour from four o'clock in the morning up to ten or eleven, with his 22,000 men, he would have overwhelmed all before him. Prince Bernhard and his 4,000 Nassauers held their position all night, and were not reinforced till about four in the morning, when General Perponcher marched the rest of his brigade there, making in all about 7,000 men, with sixteen guns. The Prince of Orange, who was the general in command of the first corps, to which Perponcher's Division belonged, arrived about six o'clock,

but brought no reinforcements: in fact, no more came up at all, until three or half-past three o'clock in the afternoon. The Duke of Wellington was on the ground at eleven o'clock, but brought no troops. When Ney did attack, at two o'clock, he only attacked with not quite 10,000 men of all arms. By three o'clock he had 17,615 in action, but during the whole of the rest of the day, he only had 22,000 men engaged, and of these only 15,750 were infantry, one of his infantry divisions (Gérard's, 4,297 strong) having been withdrawn from him by Napoleon. He made no use of D'Erlon's corps, 20,000 strong. The delay on the left was most disastrous to the French. What was the situation elsewhere?

We have seen that at midnight of the 15th the only Prussian corps in the immediate front of the French centre and right was Ziethen's – 32,692 men, less the loss of the 15th, say 1,500—say 31,000 men with 96 guns. The nearest corps to Ziethen was that of Pirch I., three divisions of which were at Mazy, nine miles from the front. These three divisions arrived there from Namur, in obedience to Blücher's order of the evening of the 14th, at three in the afternoon of the 15th, and halted at that place. They did not advance to Sombref, face to face with the French, until about ten o'clock in the morning of the 16th, when they were joined by their fourth division, and that was the time when Ziethen received his first immediate support. Up to that hour he had been alone in front of the French, and subject to be attacked by Napoleon with the centre and right of the French army, except such part as had not crossed the Sambre. The result of such an attack could not be doubtful. The next nearest corps to Pirch I. was that of Thielmann, but he was close to Namur, twenty miles distant, during the whole night of the 15th, and only commenced to advance from Namur about seven o'clock on the morning of the 16th. He arrived at Sombref about twelve o'clock of that day.

Three cannon-shots were heard from Fleurus at half-past two in the afternoon. They were Napoleon's signal for attack. By that time he had to deal with 90,000 Germans. Three-fourths of Blücher's army were concentrated and well posted for defence.

Ney, as we have seen, had waited until two o'clock to commence his attack on the left. What caused the delay?

The French army was anxious and ready to fight. Everything depended on prompt action. Had such been the case, Ney with

40,000 men would have overthrown 7,000 troops, many of whom were doubtful, being Dutch Belgians suspected of French sympathies, and with no supports at hand. Napoleon with 83,000 would have had to attack 31,000, true, with another 31,000 to support them, but that support nine miles away. The object of the sudden attack was therefore possible of accomplishment. The question is, did Napoleon display the energy which the crisis demanded, or did he press the advantages so far in his favour? It must be remembered that fully 25,000 of the French centre and right had not crossed the Sambre on the night of the 15th. It required two or three hours at least to get these troops over, and as they were the reserve artillery and heavy cavalry, besides Lobau's infantry, 10,000 strong, it was absolutely necessary to wait for them. Again, Gérard's corps was at Châtelet, and had to be moved up to Fleurus, about seven miles, while Vandamme had five miles to cover. The Guards had nine miles to march from Charleroi to reach the front.

In view of these facts, and bearing in mind that Napoleon had to wait for the reports of his various reconnoitering parties, any charge of too great delay on his part on the morning of the 16th appears unreasonable and unfair. He rose at five o'clock. His orders to his right to concentrate were sent out before eight o'clock, those for Ney before nine o'clock. He himself reached the front about noon. The French left and centre were in position by one o'clock, and the attack on the Prussians began at two. It is not easy to see how it could have begun much earlier in the day. At the same time he was doing all he could to bring up his left without actually going over in person. He sent Ney a dispatch early in the morning, asking for exact information as to the position of his various corps. As above stated, he sent a general order of movement, and also a personal letter, giving full explanations of the plan of operations before nine o'clock. He sent another dispatch at ten o'clock in reply to a hesitating message from Ney. He sent another at two, and another at three, or a little after. All were urgent expressions of his desire that Ney should advance, and if possible manœuvre to join the right. But Ney, or rather Ney's subordinate, Count Reille, for reasons satisfactory to himself, did not think fit to obey at once the first order to advance, which reached him about half-past ten. Having asked further instructions from Ney, the order to advance was repeated, but he did not come into the field until one o'clock.

Napoleon judged correctly enough that the dispersed Anglo-allied forces could not be collected in time for serious resistance to his own forces properly handled, but Ney's want of perception of the necessity for a strenuous advance lost the emperor the advantages which should have been gained on the left.

Ney on the left and Napoleon on the right were simultaneously engaged from about two o'clock. Napoleon defeated Blücher. What then did Ney effect? All that can be said is that he prevented Wellington from joining Blücher. This was no small achievement. Wellington, after arriving at Quatre Bras at half-past eleven, rode over to Blücher and promised him that by three or so in the afternoon the English army would join the Prussians. A vain promise never kept. The Duke found Ney in his road and the way was barred. Could Ney have done more than he did? It has been shewn that he could, had he acted on his orders more promptly. But it has been shewn further that the Marshal's whole force engaged was never more than 22,000 men, and that he made no use of D'Erlon's Corps of 20,000 men.

This episode is the most inscrutable in the whole campaign. The absence of these twenty thousand men alone prevented Ney from inflicting a decisive defeat upon Wellington at Quatre Bras. Siborne, who is the Duke's most uncompromising admirer, explicitly admits this fact. How did it happen?

It seems impossible to give a satisfactory answer. But the facts seem to be as follows: When Ney got his orders from Napoleon at half-past ten o'clock in the morning to advance, D'Erlon was at Jumet. (See map.) He was ordered by Ney, as part of the general movement, to advance as far as Frasne, detaching one division to Marbais. At twelve o'clock he commenced his march. Hearing the action going on in front, he left his column and rode on in advance to Frasne. He drew rein there, and while conversing with some of the superior officers was joined by General Labedoyère, who had come from Napoleon. That general showed D'Erlon a pencil note which he was taking to Ney, and which ordered the Marshal to detach D'Erlon's Corps towards Ligny. He added that he (Labedoyère) had already given the order for the change of direction of D'Erlon's column, and pointed out to D'Erlon himself the direction in which to go to join it.

Ney, in a letter dated the 26th June, 1815, complains that Napoleon had taken away D'Erlon's Corps without notifying him (Ney), and having, therefore, to act without D'Erlon, the battle of Quatre Bras was lost. D'Erlon's account of the matter seems to contradict Ney's statement. Col. Heymes, Ney's Chief of Staff, confirms D'Erlon's account, but says that Col. Laurent, not General Labedoyère, was the aide who carried the message. As D'Erlon was put in motion by Ney about eleven o'clock, in obedience to Napoleon's letter and second despatch, and as the distance from Jumet to Frasne is a little over nine miles, and as D'Erlon galloped on in advance of his column, he must have met General Labedoyère in about an hour and a half, or two hours, after eleven o'clock—say one o'clock. Now any order sent from Napoleon to Ney by the hand of General Labedoyère, and which reached Frasne by one o'clock, must have left Charleroi very shortly after half-past ten, as Charleroi is about ten miles from Frasne—if sent from Fleurus it would be eight miles. The order which Labedoyère is said to have carried, and to have shewn to D'Erlon, was contradictory of Napoleon's third despatch, and not only of that despatch, but of the whole of the previous second despatch. What had happened so early in the day to induce Napoleon to take away the first corps from Ney? The only reason which appears at all satisfactory is, that Napoleon, as he descended from his carriage at Fleurus, at twelve o'clock, saw that there was urgent need in that part for D'Erlon just then. Instead of having only a part of the Prussian army, he found three-fourths of it in front of him. And yet this explanation is not quite satisfactory, because later on in the day, namely at two o'clock and three o'clock, Napoleon sent two more despatches to Ney. The first repeated the order to attack, and informed Ney of the arrangements for Grouchy's attack at half-past two on Ligny, and stated that there was a corps of troops (not an army) to attack. The second informed Ney that the action was at its height, and ordered him to manœuvre towards the emperor. Neither of these despatches says one word about D'Erlon, or intimates in any way that he had been withdrawn from Ney. It could not be either of these which Labedoyère shewed D'Erlon, because the first says nothing about D'Erlon's moving toward Ligny, and the second was sent too late to have reached D'Erlon at the hour he and his division were on the road to Frasne.

Again, in a despatch written by Napoleon to Ney the next day

(the 17th), Napoleon complains that the marshal had not united his divisions. He says : " If the corps of D'Erlon and Reille had been " together, not an Englishman would have escaped of the corps which " attacked you." The despatch then goes on : " If Count D'Erlon " had executed the movement on St. Amand which the emperor " ordered, the Prussian army would have been totally destroyed, and " we should have taken perhaps 30,000 prisoners."

This incident of the turning aside of D'Erlon's column is one of the enigmas of history. We have stated all that we have been able to ascertain about it. We cannot accept any of the published explanations as satisfactory ; and now the actors in the drama are dead, there is no hope of any solution of the difficulty.

Where did D'Erlon go when he left his proper line of march ? If the commencement of the incident was singular, its conclusion was still more so. The new line of march of D'Erlon led him towards Napoleon. The heads of his columns showed themselves in Napoleon's left rear about half-past five in the afternoon. They must either have been longer on their cross-march than the length of the march warranted, or they must have been very much later than eleven o'clock in starting from Jumet. Whatever the truth may have been, there is no doubt on one point: their arrival was unexpected. Nobody knew who they were. Napoleon sent an aide-de-camp off at full gallop to find out, and postponed a threatened attack on the Prussian centre until the messenger should return. At half-past six the aide-de-camp came back with the information that it was D'Erlon's column, about two miles from St. Amand, exactly where it was needed for Napoleon's purpose. Charras says: "Let the order be given. In an hour twenty " thousand men of all arms will debouche on Wagnelée, on Bry, rolling " up in rear Blücher's right wing on his centre, while he is assailed " in front by Vandamme and Gérard, reinforced by the whole reserve. " The plan conceived by Napoleon will be realized. There will not " escape 20,000 Prussians. The order is not given, D'Erlon is not " summoned." But the fact seems to be, according to the best evidence, that Napoleon did summon D'Erlon more than once, but that Ney, at the same time, also repeatedly and urgently ordered D'Erlon to return to him, being in the very throes of his struggle at Quatre Bras, and that D'Erlon thought it best to obey the marshal under whose immediate command he had been placed, and not the emperor. It seems, at first sight, unlikely that such should be the

case, and Charras disputes the fact; but, on a fair examination of the whole evidence, the conclusion just stated is the most probable.

Instead of advancing to assist Napoleon, D'Erlon having been summoned by Ney to return to him, countermarched his men and arrived at Frasne too late to help Ney, as the battle of Quatre Bras was over before he got there. Twenty thousand of Napoleon's best troops marched and countermarched on this memorable day. Their absence from one field robbed the French of what undoubtedly would have been a decisive victory. Their presence on the other field would have turned an indecisive advantage into a complete triumph. Ligny would have been a second Jena. It would have been to the Prussians what Waterloo was two days afterwards to the French. Napoleon's calculations were correct. His left wing found at first practically nothing to oppose them. His right wing and centre were sufficient to defeat the Prussians. He was not responsible for the false movement which so fatally weakened both wings without benefiting either. Had Ney swept the Brussels road clear of the Anglo-allied army, Napoleon's anticipations of being in Brussels that night would probably have been realized. That it was not so was partially Ney's fault. It was not Napoleon's.

ACT III.

SCENE :—ON THE ROADS TO WATERLOO AND WAVRE.

Time :—17th June, 1815.

The morning sun of the 17th June, 1815, rose on two ghastly fields. At Quatre Bras over nine thousand combatants had been either killed, wounded or missing, while at Ligny about twenty thousand represented the loss to both sides. Perhaps altogether 30,000 men *hors de combat.* We have set forth the actual results of the previous day. Ney had blocked Wellington, Napoleon had defeated Blücher. All had been over by ten o'clock. How had the night been passed? To appreciate what took place it will be necessary to consult the map. Blücher, being forced to retire from Ligny, had two courses open to him. He could retreat by way of Namur, but that would separate him from Wellington, or he could retire to Wavre, from which place it would be comparatively easy for him to rejoin Wellington either before or behind Brussels. With desperate tenacity he, or rather his Chief of Staff, Gneisenau, chose the latter, and the whole Prussian army, including Bülow's corps, which came

up too late for Ligny, was massed upon Wavre by the next afternoon after their defeat at Ligny. Their retreat was not only not harassed by the French, but its very line was unknown to them. That it was so was a cardinal error which led directly and conclusively to Napoleon's overthrow. The more the campaign is studied, the more it appears that all other mistakes on both sides are dwarfed before this one. On Napoleon's side, Ney's inaction, D'Erlon's countermarch, were almost compensated for at the end of the 16th. On Wellington's part, his want of penetration was made up for by the intelligent disobedience of General Perponcher, and the stubborn courage of the British infantry. This error was so serious that its consequences are plainly visible in the grand catastrophe. We are quite unable to account for Napoleon's course of action. We have seen him mass his troops on the 14th, cross the Sambre on the 15th, fight Ligny, and urge on Ney at Quatre Bras on the 16th. We have seen him recognize instinctively the true situation of the Anglo-allied force, and with superior calmness quiet Ney's hesitation. We have seen him hurl at the Prussian army his old guard, a thunderbolt which laid it prostrate. Up to this point he may be said to have been quite successful enough to satisfy the demands of his proposed campaign, although not so completely successful as his plans deserved. Why did he not press his advantage? There is a mournful interest in contemplating him. We see pass before him his former glories. The Bridge at Lodi, the Pyramids, Austerlitz, Marengo. We hear the chant of the Marseillaise as they lead the van of the avenging people. We see a cruel system of despotic bondage torn away, a wakening of the fresh young life of freedom. The brave soldiers, whose bodies lie scattered in far distant fields, come before us in spirit. We see them approach their chief as he lies asleep, and with mute gesture attempt to rouse and save him from his coming fate, then pass away with dumb anguish as they perceive his lethargy. Brave children of France! Your zeal for liberty ofttimes outran discretion. You were guilty of many crimes, many follies, but you were faithful to the flag under which you fought, and to the general who led you to triumph. You came in spirit from your graves to congratulate him on his last victory and vainly to warn him of his coming defeat. There is no picture in his history so painful to our mind as the one we contemplate. The mighty emperor, surrounded by his victorious army, justly proud of themselves and him, flushed

by success, confident of complete triumph; and on the next day but one, at the same hour, behold these very troops, that mighty emperor, flying in panic-struck confusion before their defeated foe, now become a pursuing fury. Although we recognize that the result was probably better for the human race, we cannot help feeling that species of gnawing regret which eats at the heart when it recurs to what might have been, but is not.

Napoleon, instead of sleeping on the field, went back to Fleurus about eleven o'clock. It is generally admitted that before he lay down, he gave orders to Grouchy to send Pajol's light cavalry and Teste's infantry after the retiring Prussians. Thiers says he also sent orders to Ney to be under arms at daybreak, to press the English again. These latter orders are stated by no other author, but are referred to in Soult's despatch of the next morning reiterating them. Even admitting the genuineness of the other orders, those for the pursuit of the Prussians appear to be utterly inadequate. With every disposition to be chary of criticising such a man as Napoleon, we must confess that the inadequacy of these orders is a mystery to us, for which we can find no satisfactory solution. Napoleon must have miscalculated the effect of the battle. Perhaps he undervalued Blücher. Some authors attribute his lethargy to his enfeebled bodily condition—it seems to us very wrongly, on a fair consideration of all Napoleon did achieve. But whatever the reason, the fact is there that the Prussians were allowed the whole night and the next morning to retire on Wavre, and no sufficient attempt was made to follow up their traces.

Napoleon was perfectly justified in turning his whole strength immediately against the English. His plan was to throw his centre where it was needed, and he was quite right to transfer it at once from his right to his left. But why he did not ascertain more exactly what his right had to do, is very difficult to explain. He seemed to have thought that the Prussians would retire towards their own base, namely, Namur, not towards Brussels by way of Wavre, as they did. His first orders were to follow them towards Namur, and there appears to be little doubt but that, in this instance, he was mistaken in the inference he drew from his success. The person to whom is due the credit of the masterly Prussian retreat, which unquestionably saved the campaign, is Gneisenau, whose name is com-

paratively unknown. Napoleon's mistake, for it seems to us that it can be called by no other name, undoubtedly contributed to Waterloo.

The events of the day were as follows: Napoleon rose at five, and sent off orders for Lobau's Corps to march towards the left, followed by the Guard, and then the heavy cavalry. About six o'clock, General Flahault returned from Ney, and reported the result of Quatre Bras. Napoleon immediately sent a written order through Soult to Ney, explaining the position of affairs, and urging him to advance. Charras says this order was not sent off until eight o'clock; Thiers says about seven o'clock. Napoleon left Fleurus for the front about eight o'clock. Other orders were sent out at the same time for a review of the troops who had fought at Ligny. This review began about nine o'clock, and lasted till nearly noon. Meantime Lobau, the Guard, and the heavy cavalry were moving to the left, and reports from the reconnaissances were coming in. It seems to have been Napoleon's plan that Ney should advance, on the theory that the English could not oppose him, in view of the fact that the Prussians were in retreat. Ney could not advance, because Wellington was in front of him with about forty thousand men. They were not withdrawn until about one o'clock. By noon, Napoleon sent out an order by Soult to Ney to advance, and followed it immediately himself. This fact, which is important, is fixed by the despatch from Soult to Ney, which bears the date *à midi*. Before he started Napoleon gave his famous orders to Grouchy. The latter must, then, have received them between twelve and one. These orders were verbal. Thiers gives a version of them which contradicts that of Grouchy. The historian appeals to Marshal Gérard, and other witnesses, and they appear to us exactly the orders which Napoleon would have given. The *fons et origo mali* was undoubtedly the impression which the staff had, if Napoleon himself did not share it, that the Prussians were in retreat upon Namur; and from this time to the end of the campaign we see Grouchy wasting his strength hunting for Blücher exactly where he was not, and entirely ignorant as to what line he ought to take. For the present we leave him, and follow Napoleon. The latter was delayed in the advance by the resolute front shown by the English cavalry, who were protecting Wellington's retreat. He retreated as soon as he ascertained Blücher's disaster, but only to make a better stand. The English horsemen gave the French a taste of what they

might expect the next day. Between the effect of their charge at Genappes and a terrible thunder-storm, it was evening before Napoleon came face to face with Wellington at Mont St. Jean. The emperor deployed his cavalry and guns to feel whether he had a rear guard to deal with, or Wellington's whole army. When he ascertained that it was the latter, we read that he was pleased. He was destined to be more than satisfied, but the question is, was he justified in his opinion that the game was now in his own hands? We will endeavour to give a fair answer to this question, founded on the statement of the position of the various armies, as stated in the sequel.

ACT IV.

SCENE:—WATERLOO AND WAVRE.

Time:—18th June, 1815.

It is half-past eleven in the morning, Marshal Grouchy is sitting at breakfast in the garden of the notary Halbaert, at Sart-les-Walhain. With him are Gérard, Vandamme, Valazé, an engineer officer, and Baltus, in command of the artillery. Suddenly Col. Simon Lorrière enters and says: "I hear firing." The party go out to the garden, and there heavy reports are heard, so heavy that the ground seems to tremble. "It is the emperor, he is fighting the "English, let us join him," says Gérard, "We should march "towards the guns." "No," says Grouchy. "My orders are to "move to Wavre, and to Wavre I am going." The decision was fatal to France, disastrous to Napoleon, and damning for Grouchy's reputation. To correctly appreciate the situation it is necessary to retrace our steps to the position of matters after Ligny, that is on the evening of the day before the one of the incident above related.

We have seen that Napoleon sent out Pajol's cavalry in pursuit of the Prussians. Pajol took the Namur road, that is eastward towards the French right. The Prussians however were by that time in retreat towards Wavre, that is northwards, so as to join Wellington. There has never been so masterly a retreat, or so determined a strategy, as that of Gneisenau. It is impossible to give the Prussian army too much credit for their steadiness and courage during this retrograde movement. While retiring they at the same time used their cavalry in constant and vigilant patrolling, and in this respect were as active as their descendants were in 1870, while the French

were equally inactive. The result of their movement was that by nightfall of the 17th the whole Prussian army of ninety thousand men were in and around Wavre.

The Duke of Wellington only received news of the disaster at Ligny the next morning. He then commenced his retreat, also ably managed, from Quatre Bras about ten o'clock, and arrived at Waterloo about five in the afternoon.

Napoleon on the 17th, after moving off Lobau's Corps and the Guards from his right to his left, about one o'clock in the day, perhaps a trifle earlier, entrusted his right wing to Grouchy, and gave him at first verbal, then at two o'clock written orders. These latter directed Grouchy to march to Gembloux. This dispatch is said to have been suppressed by Grouchy in the controversy which arose. It was first printed in 1842. Its closing sentence is: "In all cases "keep constantly your two corps of infantry united in a league of "ground, having several avenues of retreat, and post detachments of "cavalry intermediate between us, in order to communicate with "headquarters."

Owing to a combination of circumstances entirely beyond Grouchy's control, and for which he can in no way be held responsible, he with his men on the evening of the 17th was only at Gembloux. He was, moreover, quite ignorant of where the Prussians were. He had, however, been at fault in not leaving detachments of cavalry between himself and the emperor, as the latter had ordered.

Napoleon himself had moved off to the Brussels road and followed the advance of his troops, delayed by a tremendous thunderstorm, which turned the country into a sea of mud, and reached the Caillou farm, in front of Mont St. Jean, about half-past six, to find the English in position and ready to give battle. He reconnoitered their position, the reconnaissance lasting until ten o'clock, then returned to his headquarters, which were established at the farm of Caillou above referred to. We are now in a position to appreciate why Napoleon was delighted that the English were going to make a stand alone. Apparently a puzzle why it should have pleased him, it is accounted for from his point of view. He had succeeded in his plans. He had separated the two allies. He had beaten one, not quite so thoroughly as he thought, but so far as he knew sufficiently to keep him out of any fighting for some time. He had left enough of his own army with Grouchy to watch the defeated enemy, and had given

him sufficiently plain instructions what to do. Now he had with himself his whole centre and left, with superb cavalry, enormous force in artillery, and the very *élite* of his infantry, and he was not personally aware, although some of his generals were, what the British soldier can do. He knew however that the Duke of Wellington's army was a very composite one, and he had good grounds for knowing that at least a third of it could not be trusted. When all these considerations are taken into account, it is not wonderful that Napoleon was glad that before him lay Wellington alone.

On his return to his head-quarters he issued the necessary orders for the battle of the next day, and, if his own statement is to be believed, he sent a special order to Grouchy. This order Grouchy, to his dying day, protested he never received. Many writers assert that Napoleon never sent it; but, on considering the orders known to have been sent, and Napoleon's plan of operations, we cannot believe but that it was sent. It was the very thing which Napoleon would be likely to do—keep touch with his right. We also believe that Grouchy did not receive it.

Napoleon, having retired to rest, rose again at two o'clock, and re-commenced his reconnoitering, which he kept up during the remainder of the night. The rain continued, but cleared up about four or five o'clock. If it had been possible, Napoleon would have attacked then, or very soon after, but the ground was wet for artillery. It was therefore necessary to wait. Moreover, Napoleon, as he alleged, expected Grouchy to close up to him, such being the substance of the order of the evening before, and a later one sent off about three in the morning. At ten in the morning, he sent an aide-de-camp to Grouchy, with a third order to the same effect. On these two considerations, he decided to postpone the attack on the British, and after sending off the aide-de-camp to Grouchy at ten o'clock, he slept for an hour. Then, waking at eleven, he gave the signal for attack, and at half-past eleven the Battle of Waterloo began by the discharge of one hundred and twenty guns. This cannonade lasted half an hour, and these were the guns heard by Grouchy, and towards which Gérard begged him to march.

We have thus ascertained the position of Napoleon, Wellington, and Grouchy. Where was Blücher at this time?

Communications passed between Wellington and Blücher on the 17th, in which the latter promised that he would assist Wellington, not only with two army corps, but with his whole army. He added that if Napoleon did not attack on the 18th, they would attack him on the 19th. Such was the spirit in which the men of that day fought for their homes. In pursuance of this promise he started his four corps early on the 18th. Bülow's was the leading division. Its advance reached St. Lambert (see map) about noon, but its main body not until three o'clock. Ziethen's Corps had to cross the line of Bülow's march, and, owing to the delay thus caused, did not reach Ohain (see map) until six o'clock. Pirch had to leave half his corps for the defence of Wavre against Grouchy, and joined Bülow with the other half about half-past seven in the evening. Thielmann was held at Wavre by Grouchy.

Thus, at half-past eleven, Bülow's was the only Prussian column near Wellington, and he was at St. Lambert, five miles from the fighting. From that time to half-past four, this corps was straggling through horrible roads in the valley of the Lasne, in order to seize a position on the French right. At that hour they entered into the operations of the field of Waterloo.

The reader will now understand (if he consults the map) what influence Grouchy could have had by advancing towards Planchenoit, instead of on to Wavre. It is, perhaps, only curious speculation, but it is worth following out, as the turning incident in the campaign. There is not much doubt upon one point, at all events: Grouchy could have considerably delayed, if he could not have prevented altogether, Blücher's junction with Wellington on the 18th. Granting that he was where he was in obedience to his orders; granting that Napoleon was as much responsible as he was for the waste of strength, and useless cavalry marches on the wrong flank; granting all this, giving him every credit for every possible effort hitherto; now, at all events, he should have seen the mistake. There was the firing, there were the Prussians plainly seen on the road towards it,—the very privates saw what was to be done, but the general was blind.

It is useless to fight the Battle of Waterloo over again. Thanks to the old stubborn valour of the British soldiery, and to the tenacity of the British commander-in-chief, who knew his men, and did not spare them, the British held their own. They had all they could do to manage it. It is easy to appreciate the influence which the

Prussians had, when we recollect that, at one o'clock, Napoleon had to detach two divisions of cavalry; then, somewhat later, two infantry divisions—in all, over ten thousand men; that he had to follow these by the Young Guard, and by part of the Old Guard; and that he was really fighting two battles at once.

The strength of the Prussian army actually engaged at Waterloo alone was over 51,000 men.* Their loss there was 6,998, while at Wavre they lost in addition 2,476, in all 9,474 men. The British loss proper was 6,936. That of the King's German Legion and other German troops under Wellington's command was 4,494. The Dutch-Belgians lost 4,147, of which 1,627 were "missing." Exclusive of the Dutch-Belgians, Wellington's total loss was 11,430. These figures shew that the Prussians must have done as severe fighting as the British, and prove they did not come on the field merely to witness an English victory. If Napoleon had had his whole army, and, what is more, his undivided attention to bestow upon Wellington, it is difficult to believe that he would not have been successful. Even as it was, with a large part of his force detached to one flank, and with his attention continually distracted to that flank, he captured one position, La Haye Sainte, he almost annihilated Wellington's cavalry and decimated his infantry. He drove the Dutch-Belgian contingent clear off the field. But he could not shake the British squares. Once more steadiness was more than a match for dash.

Had Grouchy obeyed the dictates of common sense and good judgment, he would probably have secured for Napoleon the opportunity of dealing with Wellington single-handed. He failed to do so, although it seems to us he might and ought to have done so. The result was that by eight o'clock in the evening Napoleon was overmastered, his army was in flight. The glories of the Republic, of the Consulate, of the Empire were for a time effaced by so crushing a disaster. History however will be more just than contemporary depreciation. The candid student will perceive that Napoleon was worthy of his reputation. His general plan of operations was capable of accomplishment, and its defeat is attributable primarily to the useless countermarch of D'Erlon, then to the delay in following up

* By half-past four o'clock, 15.906 men and 64 guns.
By six o'clock, 29,244 men and 64 guns.
By seven o'clock, 51.944 men and 104 guns.
—*Siborne.*

the Prussians, for which as General-in-Chief he must be held more than partially accountable. But even the D'Erlon *contretemps* and the delays of the 17th were remediable on the 18th. Had Grouchy been equal to the occasion, the plan of campaign would have been successfully carried out. It was not to be. The sun of Waterloo set, "and the "land had rest forty years."

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